DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 183 PS 028 157

AUTHOR	Hirsch, David
TITLE	What My Father Means to Me: Words & Drawings from America's Children about Their Fathers.
INSTITUTION	Illinois Fatherhood Iniative, Chicago.; National Center for Fathering, Kansas City, MO.
SPONS AGENCY	Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	21p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Illinois Fatherhood Initiative, P.O. Box 06260, Chicago, IL 60606; Tel: 800-996-3237 (Toll-Free); Web site: <http://www.4fathers.com>; E-mail: dads@4fathers.com
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Rearing; *Childhood Attitudes; Childrens Art; Childrens Writing; *Fathers; Freehand Drawing; *Parent Child Relationship

ABSTRACT

This booklet is a representative collection of children's essays and drawings from "Father of the Year" contests sponsored by the National Center for Fathering and the Illinois Fatherhood Initiative. The materials have been selected from tens of thousands of entries received from communities across the nation. The essays are divided by grade level, first through twelfth, and are reproduced in the children's handwriting. The booklet concludes with a series of sessions designed to help fathers understand and apply the principles of the "I-CAN's of Fathering": involvement, consistency, awareness, and nurturance. Also included is contact information for several fathering-related organizations. (EV)

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What *my* Father *means to* Me

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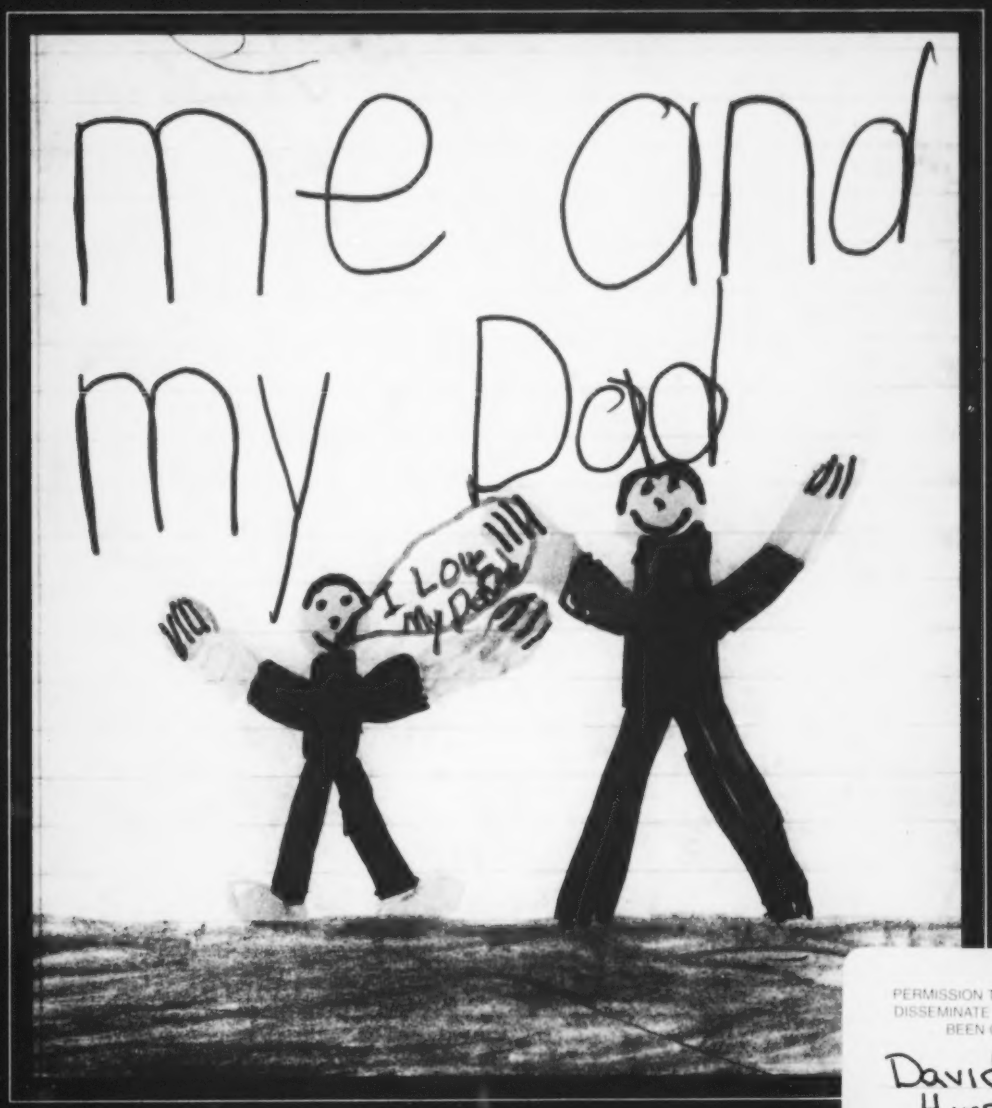

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Words & Drawings from America's Children
About Their Fathers

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Write a personal message or place your essay or drawing about "Dad" in the space provided here and give it to him on his birthday, Father's Day, or some other special day!

Cover Illustration: ***Dave***, 1st grade

What My Father Means to Me is a representative collection of children's essays and drawings from "Father of the Year" contests sponsored by the National Center for Fathering and the Illinois Fatherhood Initiative. They have been selected from the tens of thousands of entries received from communities across the nation.

As you read the essays and view the drawings that follow, try to imagine what you might have said about your father, and think about what your child would say or draw about you.

Remember, children write from their hearts. When a son or daughter renders an appraisal of his or her dad, it's heartfelt and it's honest. Its sincerity cannot be challenged or doubted. It must be accepted as truth. And the truth - whether painful or uplifting - can be the most powerful tool we possess for learning.

Each year, we involve hundreds of volunteers to read and judge the essays. The undertaking rapidly progresses from a "task" to a meaningful and emotional experience, especially for the dads involved. The messages of the children lead to deep reflection and serious consideration. We suspect that the words and pictures in this booklet will have a similar effect on you as you find yourself asking, *What's really important in my life? What occupied the bulk of my attention this past year? What must I do this week to express my commitment and love to my children?*

You may also find yourself surprised at what the children think makes a great dad. We doubt that even the award-winning Father of the Year finalists realize the impact of the little things they do: taking time on the front porch to listen to their daughter's probing questions, reading to their son at night, helping their teen during a difficult time, or showing up at a ball game or recital. The things we take for granted - or may actually think are insignificant - are of great importance to our children.

FOR COMMITTED DADS

On the last few pages of this booklet, you'll find the "I-CAN's of Fathering," a short guide on how to be the best father you can be. Together with the lessons we learn from the children's essays, it's our hope that this guide will lead you to make significant changes in your life as you develop higher aspirations for your role as father.

In the eyes of the children, responsible "every day" fathers are heroes. The dads who rise early and work to provide for their families; the dads who help with homework, play catch, drive car pools, and offer words of encouragement; the dads who though separated from their spouses, are unfailing in their visits and child support; the dads who respect their children's mother - these are the dads who children admire most and hope to emulate.

Being a dad is a tremendous responsibility - and a wonderful opportunity. For good or for bad, by your presence or absence, action or inaction, you are shaping lives and changing the future of our world. We hope this booklet will provide you with inspiration and information that can help you capitalize on this most singular opportunity.

Ken Canfield
President

David Hirsch
President

NATIONAL CENTER FATHERING

Illinois Fatherhood Initiative
"Connecting Children and Fathers"

My Dad takes me to zoos with My sister and brother. My Dad has 3 jobs. One of them is a mailman and he is a teacher at Parkland college and he is a pizza cutter.
My Dad means a lot to me. He gave me my first fish. He sings me stories. He is number 1 in my life. He is almost better than God.

Jessica

My father is the most important man in my life. He was loving, caring, thoughtful, and cool. He had a lungs disease that made it hard to breath. But that did not stop him. He used to bring my sister and I to the park. He sat at my side while he helped me learn my ABCs, count my 123, and teach me how to read. He used to call me Bud-Bud. Every school break, when he was not sick, he took our family for a vacation. Even my dad is dead, I love him very much. He is the best dad that a kid could ever have.

David

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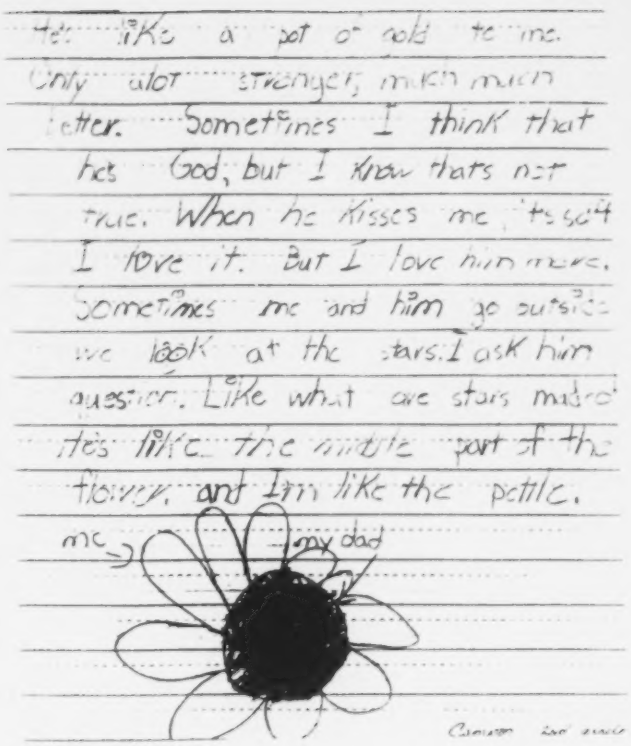
'I have the greatest dad in the world. He is always there for my Mom, my brother Joey, my sister Elizabeth, and me.
At night time he reads us books sings us our favorite songs and says our prayers.'

'During the week my brother Joey and I help my dad, every night, pack 3a bags full of oranges and apples and some snack bars. Then in the morning my dad goes under Lower Wacker Drive and hands out the bags to the homeless people that live there. I hope when I grow up, I don't only look like my dad, but act like him too! I Love my dad.'

Tommy



Cameron

Ashley, 1st grade

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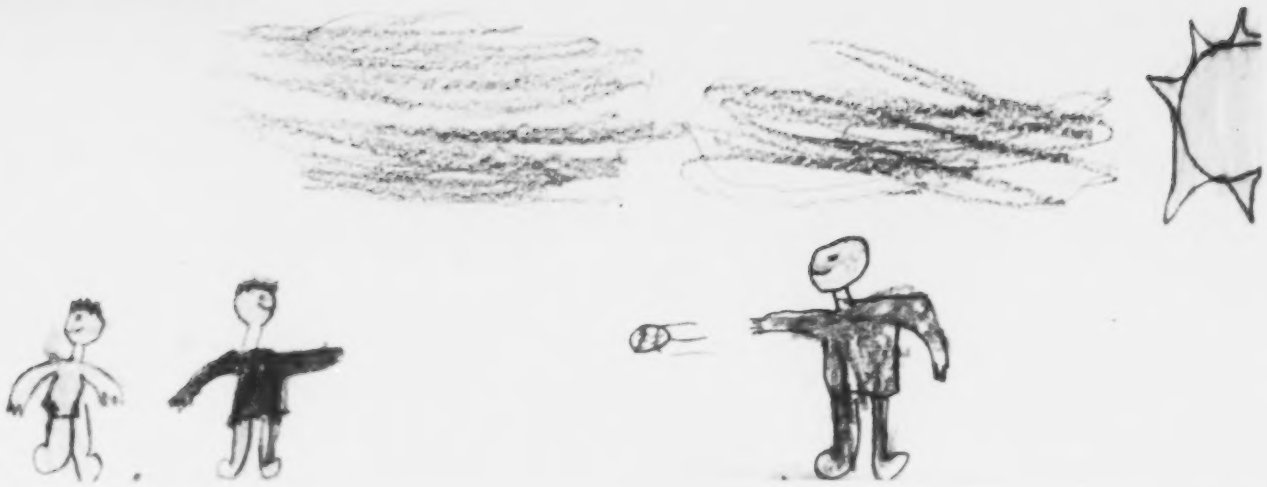

Alvin, 2nd grade

My Father is patient. He teaches me to fix things around the house. He bought me a tool box for Christmas. He put some of his extra tools in it. He taught me how to use them. I helped him put together a swing in my backyard. I also helpled to repair the seats of my picnic table.

My Father is compassionate. When my dog, Bea got loose my Father searched in the neighborhood all night to find her. I felt sad! A nice lady called us and said that Bea was at her house. My Father went and picked her up right away.

My Father a Loving heart. He and my Mom adopted me when I was a baby. I feel speçail because they wanted me so much. When we all hug together I am peanut butter and my parents are the slices of bread.

My Father protects me. He called 911 when I got candy caught in my throat. When I hurt my foot he bought me crutches. I love him very much. My Father means alot to me.

Ruth

In my life, it is my grandfather who really means something to me. My granddad means a lot because he does so many things for me. When I was five, I was scared of many things, my granddad never made fun of me. He would sit with me in my room until I would fall asleep. He told me bedtime stories about Bigfoot. He would even look under the bed for monsters and not ever laugh at me. He taught me how to get rid of bedtime monsters.

Now my granddad is the one who needs me. He can't walk. Now I help him. I tell him bedtime stories. I get him a drink when he needs one. I even get to feed him and it is fun. Sometimes I know he is telling me a story with his eyes and I smile and give him a big hug. I love you so much, Clifton. Yes, I do.

Lisa

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My dad is the most wonderful dad in the world. He's really caring and loving, so that's why I love him. If anything needs to be fixed, my dad is "Mr. Fixit."

My dad cares for other people. He's a car salesman, and he doesn't call you and brag you like other salesmen do. You might not think a salesman is really important, you're wrong. Without people selling things, you wouldn't have the thing you need. It would take you forever to walk to the store, and it would take forevers for people to carry things back.

My dad is also a great fisher. Once, we were at a fishing Contest and almost won. We thought we had a big one, but it was a boxing turtle.

My dad is so great, that if someone offered me a choice, to be rich, or to love my dad, I'd say, "Definitely love my dad. I'm already rich 'cause I've got the greatest dad"!

Robyn

Thomas is my stepdad.

Even though he is my stepdad, I see him as just my "dad". I've only known my stepdad for three years, but I feel like he's been my dad all my life. My dad is there when I go to sleep at night and he's there when I wake up in the morning. There are times in the morning when he takes me to school and buys me breakfast too.

My dad teaches me what the differences between right and wrong, and even punishes me when I do wrong or bad things. I know that even though he gets mad at me & punishes me, he does it because he loves me.

At night when I'm ready for bed my dad stays with me sometimes 20-30 minutes just talking to me about my day at school. He is there for me and gives me advice, and makes me laugh a lot. On weekends he takes me to the lake early in the morning and we play catch.

& everyone who has a stepdad should have one like mine. Just because he isn't my real dad doesn't make him any less a daddy to me. He is very much my dad to me in everyway and I love him very much. I hope I grow up to be just like him. Oh, and he also taught me how to use the macintosh apple computer.

Jason

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My **F-A-T-H-E-R** means

Family. Words can't describe how fantastic my father is. He takes my family on vacations filled with lots of fun. We go water skiing and tubing and have the best time of our life.

Athletic. He always has time to play sports with me and my family. He's always patient with me when he teaches me new sports.

Trust. I trust my father so much and he trusts me. My dad is also the Trustee of our town. He cares for everyone and wants to help.

Helpful. My dad is so helpful. He helps me with my homework if I'm having trouble. He also encourages me to try new things.

Excellent. My dad is the most excellent dad in the world and I wouldn't trade him in for anyone else in the world.

Religious. My father teaches us to be the kindest kids we can be. Caring and sharing are two very important words I learned at a very young age.

What My Father Means To Me

My dad is the best father he can be,
and that's all that matters to me.

He makes me laugh and smile,
I love to be with him for a long long while.

We love to go places together,
We never worry about the weather.

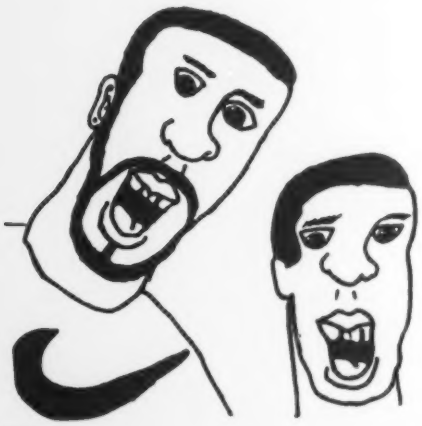
When I'm with him I feel safe and secure,
Good or hard times we'll always love each other for sure.

My dad always says to look on the bright side of life for everything we do,
So when were fishing we laugh, even if we just catch a shoe.

He is caring, loving and especially fun,
My dad is definitely #1!

Whether I win or lose this contest, I'm so glad I had the chance to put my thoughts into words and let someone else know how wonderful my dad really is. He truly is the best to me!

Errin



Eric

My Dad means the world to me because he's my Dad and he loves me and I love him. He's the nicest Dad in the world.

I have four brothers and one sister and my Dad loves us all. He finds times to spend with us all. My Dad is a good person, he not only does for us but, helps others.

My Dad is also a foster Parent. We take in kids that needs us. He says it's a good thing to do. Sometimes it's hard to see kids leave. Because it makes my Dad sad. We are adopting two of them this month.

My Dad tries to teach me respect and things I need to know. He taught me that you can love alot of people all at once and he does. He teaches me to help people, like my best friend. My best friend just lost his dad and it makes me sad. I know that my job is to make him feel better so I'll just be there when he needs to talk to me. I will try to be a good listener like my dad listens to me when I have problems.

I have a problem with reading and writing, so my Dad tries to help me. At times I want to give up, but Dad says you can't give up no matter what. I'm different than other kids but, I know it's ok to be different. My Dad says so".

Brad

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I'm writing about somebody special. This person is an excellent cook. He learned how to cook when my mom was a nursing student. Since my mom was always studying or at school, he became our family's cook. He is famous for his homemade noodles and his homemade fudge.

This special person is always eager to provide transportation for myself and my three sisters to and from our activities, and he never complains about it. He is a very patient man. Sometimes my sports practices run late, but he never says a word. He has attended every parent/teacher conference, every concert, every play, and every track event I've ever had. I know that I can always count on him to be there for me. Every evening, after making dinner for our family, he helps me with my accelerated math homework. Currently, we are working on a Science Fair Project together.

This very special person has designated Sundays as "Family Day" in our house. In today's society, some fathers do not take their parenting responsibilities seriously. This special person believes that "family always comes first". What is so wonderful about this special person is that he isn't even my father, he is my stepfather, Bill. Although he has never had any children of his own, he is the best father I could ever ask for. Not only does he love me and my sisters, he loves my mom too!

If there is one thing that would possibly improve my relationship with Bill, I would want to be able to do more for him and allow him to be the recipient of what he has taught me: kindness, patience, compassion and a real sense of family. I love him, he means everything to me. Thanks to Bill, I know what having a father feels like. Sadly, I know that there are children who may never experience this feeling. I am so proud to say that Bill is my Dad.

Brittany

Morgan, 1st grade

My Dad The Hero

My Dad is a hero. My Dad is the tallest, the baldest, and the brightest man in the world. I have the best fireman in Chicago living in my house, my Dad! He is a lelutenant and he did very good on his test. I am so proud of him.

My Dad was my basketball coach this year and we won the championship game. I looked over at him and saw how proud he was of all the girls on the team. He cares for all of them. I walked over and gave him a hug and said,"Thanks Dad!" He thought I meant for the game, but I meant for being MY DAD. I am so proud of him. When he coaches and in everyday life he tells me these things: "Be proud of yourself. Be secure with-in yourself. Never give up, keep on trying. Reach for the stars. And Mary I love you."

If I wrote a letter to God, I could not have described a better choice than Tom

When I have trouble in school he is there to help me. He makes things easy and fun to learn. When I need advice on school work, sports, or my friends I call for my Dad. My Dad the big hard guy, yet who is so soft on the inside. It feels so safe and secure with his arms around me. I think I have found the safest place in the world, my Dad's arms.

My Dad was there for all my firsts. My first word,"Da-Da." My first step was into his arms. When I lost My first tooth, he wiped the tears away. He was there running behind me when I learned to ride a bike. He has taught me how to play baseball and basketball. He is always there for all of us in my family.

Mary

Ashlyn, 1st grade

The best thing my dad does with me is spend *time*.

It's 4:30 Saturday morning when the alarm clock rings. Dad is keeping his promise to take me fishing. We're going to catch the big ones!

There won't be any fishing Sunday morning though. Dad makes sure we all go to church together.

Sunday night (and every other night) Dad creates a different world by reading to me. He turns my room into a bug-infested jungle, a crime scene, or a peaceful country farm. He has separate voices for each character and uses sound effects.

Every month Dad helps me scrub my dog down with shampoo and rinse her off with warm water. He also helps clean out the rabbit cages. He always says that next time I'll have to do it myself because the cages smell so bad, but he always helps me.

Dad has a tradition of baking bread the night before Easter. That's what he did with his dad, and now he does it with me. This year the bread didn't rise so Dad called it brick bread.

Dad always makes time for sports with me. The night before baseball tryouts, I realized that I hadn't practiced very much. Dad flipped on the backyard lights and we played catch for an hour. We also play basketball together. Right now we can't play because I left my basketball outside and Dad took it away. He wants me to learn responsiblity.

Sometimes Dad leaves a note saying that he loves me and hopes that I have a good day. This my not seem like much, but to me it starts my day off on a high note.

I hope my dad lives a hundred years. That means we would have a lot more *time* to spend together.

Matt

If all dads were like my Dad the world would be perfect. You wouldn't hear anyone complaining about a bad childhood; you wouldn't hear anyone saying that their father didn't have time for them, or didn't love them; you would hear kids talking about how great their dads are. Simply because the world would be full of good role models, and fathers that love their children.

I admire my Dad more than anyone else that I know. He's not rich, he's not a pro athlete, he's not famous. None of these things matter, because my Dad has and is everything important to me. In my eyes the perfect father should love his family, do what is right, put his family before his job, and most of all, love God. My Dad fits this description perfectly.

One reason I admire my father is that he pursues his dreams. At one time my Dad had a well paying job as a district manager for Hardees. He gave all of this up to pursue his lifelong dream of becoming a doctor, and to follow God's will. It's not easy to become a doctor. The minimum amount of schooling and training is 11 years! He's in his eighth year. This shows that he's also willing to sacrifice. Just like all good fathers should.

My Dad has always been there for me. Whenever I need help or advise he is who I go to. We have gone through the good and bad times together. I love him and he loves me. It's not like any other love. It's a deep love that could go through anything. My relationship with my Dad is worth more than anything else in the world. I just wish that every kid could say the same.

Jason

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My father is a major part of my life and I hope he will continue to be. Although I don't live with him he is there for me almost as much as if I did live with him. My father offers me advice about school, responsibilities, and life in general. Without him I think I would be on a different track.

Almost any time of day, or anytime of week, I can see, or be in touch with my father. Most black fathers today are not half as responsible as my father. Even though he has his own family (wife, 7 year old daughter, 3 year old son and 1 year old daughter) he always finds time for me. We go to the shows, or I just spend the weekend at his house in Robbins, Illinois.

My father, Derek [redacted] is a devoted father, husband, and christian. To me his the perfect father and I love him dearly.

Jaquin

My father really doesn't mean much to me because he's really never been there for me. Maybe he acts like he cares because he gives me everything I want.

A father is someone who helps his child through thick and thin. A father teaches his child how to play sports and gives them love. A real father goes to plays and gives them flowers afterwards. A father is there to help his child with their home-work.

My fathers figure isn't anyone, but I can picture the perfect father. He would actually live with me. He would tickle me out of bed and cook me breakfast, then he would drive me to school. There he'll be by my side and love me forever.

Jesmin

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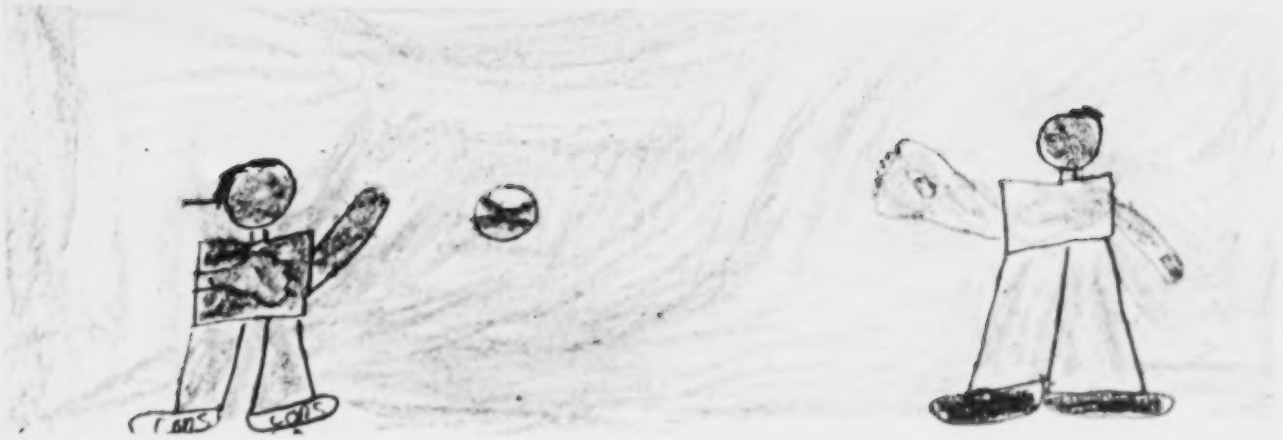

Donavan, 2nd grade

I am 14 years old and my father left me when I learned to say 'daddy'. Even though my father's not around, in my heart he is always here. Every birthday and every Christmas I cross my fingers in hope that my father will come home. Does my wish come true? No, but I never quit looking and hoping.

What really hurts is walking through the mall and seeing little girls with their fathers walking hand in hand. I can see how much he loves his little girl, but I can't see my father loving me as his little girl. See in my life, there's not 'morning', 'daddy', and me, it's just me and 'morning'.

I see my father alot in my dreams but never does he turn around. I call for him but he just keeps walking away. I'd like to believe he misses me, but how can he miss a stranger?

Everytime I blow the candles out on my birthday cake, I wish the same wish that I have for the past 13 years. I wish that stranger would turn around and look at me. Maybe if he saw all the pain and suffering from living without him in my eyes, he would become a part of my life. For now all I can do is to wish and never give up hope, for hope is all I have, to hold on to.

Even though it's hard to say, my father means the world to me, and if I had the chance to tell him all of this, I would not change anything, but I would add a couple of 'I love yous'.

Crystal

My father, Gesner [redacted] is a man who has endured many hardships and struggles but overcame whatever obstacles that stood in his way. Born and raised in Haiti, a country plagued with poverty and despair, my father has had many setbacks and let downs. Then this courageous man came to America with such an innocence and a pureness of heart. He did not speak a word of English. He was ridiculed and harassed because he was a foreigner. But discouragement and the phrase "giving up", never entered his mind. Gesner, with an immeasurable amount of discipline and everlasting faith instilled in him, would never stop until he reached the utmost goals that he had set for himself. He climbed the highest mountain, swam the deepest sea, and followed the longest rainbow where at the end, he saw all of his dreams begin to unfold. He found happiness, success, a beautiful wife, and four beautiful daughters. In his wife he instilled a unique love and in his children he instilled the magnificent moral values, determination, and dignity that was raging like fire in the very depths of his soul.
A man of radiance.
He passed the test.
A man with more pride than all the rest.
When you look deep into his eyes, you can see determination shine.
This man is my father, my hero, my friend, until the very end of time.

Nehanda

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Looking Up

"Let go! Let go!" I screamed into the scorching summer's sun

I will <u>always</u> remember that day when my father, no my hero, was teaching me how to ride my brand new two wheeler.

My father isn't a sports hero or rich, a famous actor or a doctor, but he has done something to make this world a better place. He has <u>always</u> been there for me, twenty-four hours a day for fifteen years. For example, my father is the one who comes to every one of my baseball games and who asks me if I need any help with my homework.

To say that I admire my father is an understatement because he is the one that I look up to every day through every adventure that I conquer I am honored and privileged to say that I am able to share my experiences with him.

"I did let go!" my father yelled back at me

But he didn't really let go that day. My father might have let go of that brand new bike, but he never let go of my heart!

Ingrid

A father figure is something very hard to find or even define in my life. I've spent about three-quarters of my life without a father, having a strong, wonderful, single mother. Throughout my life there have been men who have inspired me and a few who have even taken the role of being a father figure to me, none more so important than my eight-grade teacher

I have great respect for Mr. [redacted] because our relationship has always been straight forward. He never has told me anything outside the truth, and I trust him completely. For as long as I can remember, teachers have always told me that I had unlimited potential. Mr. [redacted] couldn't agree more and thanks to his challenges and inspirational words, I have begun to realize how true those words really are. Like any other relationship, we do have our classic confrontations. He always pulls me aside and sets me straight when he believes I need to get myself focused again.

In light of my never having a stable father figure in my life, whether or not I'm qualified enough to say who is the best father is, is not up to me. I know that the person whom I speak of, Mr. [redacted], is a very influential male character in my life. He has never failed me and I really appreciate his always taking the extra time to look after not only me, but all of his students. I really value our relationship greatly just like any son would value his relationship with his father. I would like to nominate Mr. [redacted] for his influential role in many young peoples lives, but especially for his taking the time to be my "interim father."

Omar

My father was the most adored person in my life, while he was living. He just passed away in February of 1999. I only wish he were alive now to hear what I have to say about him. If there were such a thing as a perfect relationship, it would have been ours. My relationship with my father was awesome. He was not just a father, he was my mentor and my best friend!

There were many, many times in which I had encountered problems; I was able to turn to my father. Whether the problem be about school, family, friends, or relationships; my father was there. I could talk to him about anything. There were also many occurrences when my father and I would argue. Times when I would give him the cold shoulder. Of course, my father would always be the one to apologize. He taught me not to take things for granted, and to always shoot for the best. My father also taught me how to move will power, and be good self esteem. If I were to ~~forgive~~ complain I was ugly, my father would tell me I was beautiful. If I were to complain I was stupid, my father would tell me I was smart. Towards the end of my fathers life, it was just the opposite. See, my father was suffering from cancer for over a year and a half. During that year and a-half, he was very weak, and on at least a dozen medications. Time after time, he would say "I'm useless;" and time after time I would say "You are so wonderful." I would have been lost without my ~~father~~ father. In fact, I am lost now. What really helps me is to think about how great he was. He was a very skilled craftsman, very creative, and best of all, a very loving father. He was loving until the end. The hardest part was in the last months of my father's life. It was very difficult for me to see him so sick, especially when I was told that he was not going to live. I only wish he were still here. ~~Although~~ although he's not, his memory lives on. ~~I~~ I will always ~~remember~~ remember what my father taught me. Everyone says "I think want to be like my parents!" Well, I can't wait until the day when I grow up and can be as spectacular as my father was.

"I love you always Dad."

Lisa

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What makes an exceptional father?

Many dads do not know the meaning behind this second "full-time job". Some place work before their family, others abandon their loved ones in times of stress. My father, on the other hand, is a steadfast anchor to our family. He not only provides monetary income, but also support, compassion, and commitment.

Four years ago in March, my mother ended her painful struggle with breast cancer. This marked an extremely challenging and changing time in our lives. My sister and I were still young, and barely knew anything about being responsible. My dad, despite floods of old memories and daily mailboxes overflowing with hosptial bills, managed to upkeep the household and continue our education in the Catholic school. Throughout this time, we taught *each other* the important skills of cooperation, patience, and organization.

There are times when I look back and say, "I do not know how we made it". We were left with a pile of confusion in our hands after my mom's death. Bravely, my dad took it into his own hands to learn the basics. He read sewing manuals, became an excellent cook (thanks to Chef Boyardee!), remodeled the house, and learned how to communicate in a house full of girls. I appreciate his positive attitude. It remains our guiding light.

Saturday mornings became our "huff and fluff"; as my dad likes to call it! The three of us comb the entire house, making sure that everything is washed and returned to its original spot.

Food presented a large obstacle in our lives. My mother was always the one to prepare meals for us, and withour her, we were lost. Figuring that we couldn't live off of cold cereal and canned goods for the rest of our lives, he picked up a cookbook and began at square one. I am very proud of his driving attitude, and I wish that at times, I could be more like him.

I really respect my father. One particular reason is the fact that he never brought another woman into our house after my mom's death. My sister and I were very touchy about the dating issue. My dad waited over 13 months until he attempted to date again. Now, I stop and really think about it- he was a very committed man. He must have loved my mother very much.

When he was merely twenty-one, his father died of lung cancer at age fifty. To show his value of family closeness, he went back home on a weekly basis, to support my grandmother and his younger brothers and sister. He taught them how to drive, automotive tips, financing, and above all, guidance. He is never tobusy to offer a helping hand-*to anyone!*

I know of many fathers who would walk out on the situations my father was placed in. My dad viewed it as a challenge *that he must surpass.* I've been waiting for an opportunity like this to let everyone know just how great he is. He tells everyone that we are the pride and joy of his life, and that to fulfill his every wish is to see us grow up and prosper in the world. We won't let him down.

Kim

For years I have been a foster child I have never known the love a father and daughter share. There was no one to help me with school, there was no one to help me at all As a child I had no one to look up to. I had no one to call dad I have a dad now He is the most giving compassionate man I know. He took in a girl who had no where to go Not only was she a stranger, she was a stranger with a past She was me. He has stood with me through moments of hell We have climbed mountains together the last two years. He gave a girl on the brink of death a chance to experience life. He is an example for all people A member of big brother big sister, an activist for the homeless, an activist for me I call him Dad.

Donna

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Tom, 1st grade

What my father means to me. Now that's a tough one. It's tough because my dad hasn't played a gigantic role in my life. However, he has opened my eyes to many realities."

As a young child, I was the ever famous "daddy's girl" of the family. On special occasions my dad would take me fishing, play catch in the front yard, and even go swimming with me at the neighborhood swim club. These were fun times, but the main reason I received that title was because I always defended him. It became a routine as I was growing up for my parents to fight, and it also became a routine for me to stand in my dad's corner." Although my dad was nearly always at fault, I remained by his side.

One day the truth came out. My father was an alcoholic. This terrible disease led to many downfalls and affected many lives. However, the mistakes my dad made while he was drinking taught me some valuable lessons. Alcohol is a destructive drug. It destroys families, self esteem, and in some cases, respect. I am very proud of my dad for being a strong enough person to admit his addiction and do something about it. Although I've gone through life without much assistance from my father, I've never doubted his love and he should never doubt mine.

Natalie

Abba

You call your father, Dad or Daddy, Aspa or Pop. I call my father, Abba. I call him, baker, cooker, cleaner, laundry doer, sweeper, mopper, helper, shopper, runner, doer. My father is the one who makes our lunches and the one who brings our lunches when we forget them, the one who takes me to the doctor and picks up the prescriptions from the drug store, the one who taught me Algebra and teaches me everyday how to be like him — the teacher, giver, story teller, kind-hearted man.

Your father is the banker, the lawyer, the plumber. My father is the doctor, fixer, tucker inner, giver of hugs and wiper of tears; he is the finder of missing shoes and the saver of problems, the judge and mediator, the giver of everything — love, patience, guidance, laughter, strength, support and time.

You want to be a writer, an accountant, an engineer. I want to be like my father. I want to be strong and wise like he is. I want to be kind and honest and sincere like he is. Whether I become an architect or a journalist, I want to be like my Abba.

My father is a magician. He doesn't pull rabbits out of his hat, he pulls hours — he gives us time. After a long day, after making lunches and going to work and driving carpool, after dropping the clothes off at the cleaners and making dinner, my father listens to my poems and helps my brothers and sisters with homework. My father has time for all of us, all eight of us — Meir Yakov, me, Ezi, Pessa, Shaya Sara, Ephraim Avigail and Mommy.

The best thing is that he loves us and there is nothing better than that.

Nachama

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THE I-CAN'S OF FATHERING

As you can tell from the essays you've just read, it isn't necessary to pursue an advanced degree in child development to be a great dad. What may be most helpful in our quest to become better fathers is a fresh perspective on our role as dads.

The National Center for Fathering has surveyed over 10,000 fathers about their fathering practices and ideals, and synthesized their responses into 48 aspects or factors. Collectively, these form the framework for fathering which we call - **The I-CAN's of Fathering**:

I=Involvement
C=Consistency
A=Awareness
N=Nurturance

Using the I-CAN's framework, we developed a series of sessions to help you understand and apply each fathering principle and tap into the experiences of other fathers. Each session has three parts to be completed in order: **READ** specific essays in this booklet; **REFLECT** upon what they suggest about your fathering; and **RESOLVE** to apply your learning to your relationships with your children.

You will benefit greatly if you can meet with other fathers to discuss these questions, because when we listen, support and hold one another accountable, we increase our opportunity for growth in our fathering. So, get together with some other dads, and see where the I-CAN's of Fathering can take you. (While the sessions are designed to stimulate discussion in small groups, they can also be studied individually or with your spouse.)

SESSION 1: THE IMPACT OF A FATHER

1

Your relationship with your father has a significant impact on the way you will father your own children.

READ: Ingrid, 10th grade, "Looking Up," p.11
Crystal, 9th grade, p.10

REFLECT: Think about your own relationship with your father and answer the three questions below. If possible discuss with one or more other dads:

- **What do you remember most about your father?**
- **What would you like to have heard more from him?**
- **Write down five ways you're like your father, and five ways you're different than him.**

CAUTION: Our goal is to think about both the strengths and weaknesses of our relationship with our father. There may be some issues you need to work through. The first three chapters of *The Heart of a Father* by Ken Canfield *(Chicago: Northfield, 1996)* give excellent guidance in this area, or you may want to seek the help of a wise friend or counselor.

RESOLVE: 1. What one thing can you do to strengthen your relationship with your own father or father figure?
2. Do you see one area where the way you were raised affected your own fathering negatively? What can you do about it?
3. Do you see an area where your dad affected your fathering positively? How can you capitalize on this legacy?

Session 2: Involvement

2

Involvement has three dimensions: **taking responsibility** for everything from changing diapers to providing food to driving kids to school; **connecting in a direct way** by participating in activities with your child; and **being accessible** - being immediately available (physically), or your child knowing they can reach you on short notice by telephone or e-mail.

Read: Tommy, 2nd grade, p.3
Jaquin, 8th grade, p.9

Reflect:
- **Which of these dads was really involved with his children? What stood out about that involvement to the children - was it special trips or everyday activities?**
- **Approximately how many hours of your week are devoted to your work, to each child, to your marriage?**
- **How would you describe the ideal work/family arrangement for your situation?**
- **What secrets have you learned to create more time for your family?**

Resolve: Decide on one thing (and one thing only) you want to change to be more involved as a dad. Commit yourself to make the change -- in writing, or to another dad. Agree to revisit your commitment at a future date.

Session 3: Consistency

3

A dad needs to be consistent in several ways - in his **schedule**, in his **moods**, and in his **character**. Above all else, a dad needs to keep his word, admit when he's made a mistake, and correct the situation.

Read: Mary, 6th grade, p.7
Matt, 7th grade, p.8

Reflect:
- **How do these dads demonstrate consistency in different areas of life?**
- **Have you been able to tell your children you were wrong about something? What happened and what was the result?**
- **What is the difference between consistency and rigidity?**

Resolve: 1. Make a list of promises you've made to your children and haven't kept. Then ask each of your children and your wife if there are any promises you haven't kept. Take action to set the situation right.
2. Write each of your children an affirming note.

Session 4: Awareness

4

Research by the National Center for Fathering shows that one key practice that separates effective fathers from other fathers is "active listening." Dads must take the initiative to find out what's going on with their children. Dads need to be aware of 1) **general child development information** (e.g. that most 3-year-olds actually enjoy having the same book read to them again and again) and 2) **specific individual information** about their children (e.g. individual personality and temperament, learning style, and interests).

Read: Jesmin, 8th grade, p.9
Jason, 4th grade, "Thomas Is My Step Dad," p.5

Reflect:
- **How does Jason's father find out about what's going on in his son's life?**
- **What would Jesmin's dad know about her interests?**
- **What are the emotional and physical issues your child's age group is dealing with?**
- **Try answering these questions about your child:**
  Who is your child's all-time hero? What's your child's most prized possession? Who are his three closest friends? What would she point to as her biggest accomplishment recently? What was your child's biggest discouragement this past year?

Resolve: Pick one of these action points as a next step:
- Listen to some of your child's music and discuss it with them.
- Eat a meal at school with them and some of their friends.
- Have a discussion with one of your child's instructors to find out how they're doing.

Session 5: Nurturance

5

Love is undoubtedly the bottom line - but is it expressed? That's what nurturance is - love made tangible. It includes everything from spoken or written words of encouragement, to physical touch, to discipline. It's the ability to connect with your child on an emotional level.

Read: Ruth, 3rd grade, "My Dad Adopted Me," p.4
Nachama, 12th grade, "Abba," p.13

Reflect:
- **What struck you about the dads described in these essays by their children?**
- **What are special ways you say "I love you" to your children?**
- **How did your dad express affection to you? How has that affected the way you communicate it to your children?**
- **Is discipline an expression of love? How is it perceived in your home? What causes you to hesitate in nurturing your children?**

Resolve: Decide one area where you can grow in expressing affection for each of your children: verbal encouragement, physical touch, sharing who you are, or setting boundaries and enforcing them. Write down what it is and develop a specific action plan for you to take with each of your children.

Session 6: Where Do We Go From Here?

6

Fathering is both constant and ever-changing. As you and your children age, you both enter into new stages of life.

Read: David, 1st grade, p.2
Lisa, 3rd grade, p.4

Reflect:
- **What aspect of fathering would you like to develop further? Who can assist you? How can you help another dad?**
- **Project yourself and your children ahead five and ten years. How will you prepare for your children's continuing development and your changing relationship with them?**
- **You may have prepared your child's financial future in the case of your untimely death. Are there other men in your child's life who could become father figures if necessary?**
- **Is there a fatherless child you know who needs a father figure? What can you do to reach out to him or her?**

Resolve: Decide how you will prepare yourself for the future joys and challenges of fathering. Consider continuing to meet with one or more of the dads in your group on a periodic basis for mutual encouragement and accountability in your critical role as a father.

Session 7: Connecting To Fathering Resources

7

The I-CAN's sessions are a starting point - to give you a sense of who you are as a dad, and who you could be. Being a father is a lifetime commitment, and one of the ways you can keep your commitment strong is to connect with organizations that provide support.

The National Center for Fathering provides a wide range of practical resources and timely assistance for dads seeking advice. The Center's web site at www.fathers.com contains more than 100 short articles addressing nearly every fathering situation, each with recommendations for further assistance. The site also hosts chat rooms and bulletin boards, and provides links to other fathering sites.

For ongoing information, you can subscribe to Today's Father, a FREE quarterly magazine published by the National Center for Fathering. To subscribe, call 1-800-593-DADS. Please mention the What My Father Means To Me booklet when you call.

Another way to get continuing support is to be proactive and establish resources in your community. For those interested in bringing the Illinois Fatherhood Initiative to their area, you can call 1-800-996-DADS. Again, please mention the booklet when you make your call.

The National Center for Fathering and Illinois Fatherhood Initiative are committed to helping men become better fathers and father figures. Please visit our web sites or contact us with any questions you may have. We would be happy to help you as an individual, or support an organization you're involved with in your efforts to equip men for their fathering roles.

Illinois Fatherhood Initiative
P.O. Box 06260
Chicago, IL 60606
(800) 996-DADS
www.4fathers.com
e-mail: dads@4fathers.com

National Center for Fathering
P.O. Box 413888
Kansas City, MO 64141-3888
(800) 593-DADS
www.fathers.com
e-mail: dads@fathers.com

In addition, there are a number of other organizations throughout the country that can either provide information, or serve as an example of what can be done to support responsible fathering. The groups listed below represent only a sampling:

At-Home Dad
61 Brightwood Avenue
North Andover, MA 01845-1702
e-mail: athomedad@aol.com

Athletes Against Drugs
180 North LaSalle, #3800
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 263-4618
e-mail: aad@enteract.com

Boot Camp for New Dads
Basic Training for New Dads
4605 Barranca Parkway
Suite 101-E
Irvine, CA 92604
(714) 786-3597
ww.newdads.com
e-mail: tangelo@exo.com

Center for Successful Fathering
13740 Research Boulevard, Building G-4
Austin, TX 78750
(512) 335-8106
www.fathering.org
e-mail: rklinger@onr.com

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
P.O. Box 7164
Dublin, OH 43017
(614) 764-3009

Family University
P.O. Box 270616
San Diego, CA 92198
(619) 487-7099
www.familyuniversity.com
e-mail: familyu@aol.com

Father-to-Father
Children, Youth, and Family Consortium
University of Minnesota, 201 Coffey Hall
1420 Eckles Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
(612) 626-1212
www.cyfc@tc.umn.edu
e-mail: cyfc@tc.umn.edu

The Fatherhood Project
Families & Work Institute
330 Seventh Avenue, 14th Floor
New York, NY 10001
(212) 465-2044
www.familiesandwork.org
e-mail: levineja@aol.com

Father's Resource Center
430 Oak Grove Street
Suite B-3
Minneapolis, MN 55403
(612) 874-1509
www.slowlane.com/frc/

Institute for Responsible Fatherhood & Family Revitalization
1146 19th Street, NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 293-4420
www.responsiblefatherhood.org

MAD DADS
3030 Sprague Street
Omaha, NE 68111
(402) 451-3500
www.maddadsnational.com
e-mail: maddadsnational@infinity.com

National Center on Fathers & Families (NCOFF)
University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education
3700 Walnut Street, Box 58
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216
(215) 573-5500
www.NCOFF.GSE.Upenn.edu
e-mail: mailbox@NCOFF.gse.upenn.edu

National Fatherhood Initiative
#1 Bank Street, Suite 160
Gaithersburg, MD 20878
www.fatherhood.org
e-mail: nfi1995@aol.com

Prison Fellowship
P.O. Box 17500
Washington, DC 20041-0500
(703) 478-0100
e-mail: bgil@pfm.org

Urban Ventures Center for Fathering
3041 4th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55408-2410
(612) 822-1628
e-mail: uvlt@bitstream.net

For additional copies of this booklet please call 1-800-996-DADS.

What My Father Means To Me
is a joint publication of the
Illinois Fatherhood Initiative and the
National Center for Fathering,
made possible by...

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